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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a collaborative project with 20 preservice teacher education students to develop methods for working with curriculum integration of English and social studies. A portion of the methods class was team taught and involved the students in the preparation of interdisciplinary units on a young adult novel. This modeling of the process of integration followed a pattern of community building that was reflected in the student work. Through observation and student journal entries, the study showed that a valuable teaching technique was developed. Both students and professors were changed by the experience. (Author/EH)

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Promoting Curriculum Integration Through Example
or
Practice What You Preach:
A Case Study

Abstract

In order to prepare preservice teacher education students to work with curriculum integration, the authors (one from English Education and one from Social Science Education) team taught a portion of their respective methods courses involving the students in the preparation of interdisciplinary units on a young adult novel. This modeling of the process of integration followed a pattern of community building that was also reflected in the student work. Through observation and student journal entries, the authors show that a valuable teaching technique was developed. Both students and professors were changed by the experience.

Promoting Curriculum Integration Through Example or Practice What You Preach: A Case Study

Preface

To begin at the beginning. Community and collaborations are often accidental. People discover common interests, share common work space, and laugh about the same things. Our story is no different.

We were new faculty in the secondary education program of a small rural state college, who had both worked with the same mentor (but at different universities at different times). We both had recently completed doctorates and moved to a new locale. As we attended meetings and other college events, we discovered more things in common: a shared Southern heritage; being newcomers in both the college and community; and similar professional interests such as middle schools, team teaching, cooperative learning, and curriculum integration. We also spent a great deal of time laughing.

After the first year, our offices were moved so that we were only two doors apart. Proximity and common interests led to discussions, which led to longer discussions, which led to work on college projects, which led to professional presentations, which led to guest appearances in each other's classes, which led to a combined multi-week unit within our methods classes, which led to the team teaching of an entire course, which led to collaborating on professional articles such as this one.

Introduction

This paper will address the ongoing debate over single discipline versus interdisciplinary instruction at the collegiate level. Drawing on the work of Drake (1993), Jacobs (1989), and others, a case will be made that since curriculum integration is a topic of much interest and concern in the secondary schools, we must prepare the next generation of educators to address the developing standards of the profession with their peers

in an integrated fashion.

During their preservice coursework, students need to observe, experience, and reflect on learning activities from both student and teacher perspectives. Generally, there are more opportunities for direct experience as students than as teachers. In addition, there are limited opportunities for preservice teachers to see modelling of curriculum integration. It is particularly important to consider the powerful positive effects of teacher modelling on changes in student behaviors (Brophy & Good, 1991).

Curriculum integration depends on the ability of the members of a group to be able to relinquish total control over their individual course curricula and, through negotiation, develop a new set of curriculum standards that go beyond the standard walls of the disciplines. This collegial undertaking demands a sense of trust and community between the members of the group. Based on a case study of a collegiate methods course, a description of the curriculum integration process as community building is presented.

Community

The concept of community is one that gets bandied

about with abandon by those of us in education. We often speak of the community of sociologists, the community of scholars, the community of learners, our community, community life, community spirit, and so on. We always seem to know what we mean, the context developing a frame in which our intent is made clear, at least to us. We use the phrase "sense of community" and further augment it with the idea that whatever that sense of community may be, it is possible to foster and/or promote it.

Before we can address the validity of that premise, we need to agree upon what we mean by community. According to Webster, a community is "people with common interests living in a particular area" or "interacting populations of various kinds of individuals in a common location." Sociologists have for years taken this definition and stated that for a community to be present, there are three characteristics: **place, interaction, and mutuality of interests** (Borgatta and Borgatta, 1992). All three must be present simultaneously for community to exist. Without them, we have psuedo or quasi communities or communitylike structures, but not community.

There is much talk today about the school as a community. Is this really possible? Considering the

previous definition, perhaps. There is a common location or place (the campus), there is an interaction between people, there should be a common set of interests. A recent Carnegie Foundation report presents a variety of kinds of communities that might exist on a school campus. They range from the educationally purposeful community to the caring community and the celebrative community. Each demands its own attention (Carnegie Foundation, 1990).

Going beyond the campus, Oldenburg (1989) discusses in his book Great Good Places how, we, as humans, are in search of somewhere to comfortably interact with peers. Somewhere where we can share our thoughts with others in a nonthreatening environment. Somewhere where everybody knows your name. The typical school generally lacks such places. Neophyte faculty members are left adrift in search of a new support system. A new community.

Curriculum integration as community building

For these new teachers and their more experienced colleagues, curriculum integration may be seen as a way of coming together. Curriculum integration can be seen as a community building or community inspired model of teaching. For success it demands the same definitional characteristics (place, interaction, mutuality of

interests) to be present with one addition. First, teachers who are going to be working on interdisiciplinary or integrated instruction, of course, must have proximity to one another (place). It is our contention that physical closeness is necessary. The fax machine and e-mail are wonderful, but they don't replace human contact and conversation. One colleague happens upon another by the water fountain or at the coffee machine. Casual comments lead to the beginnings of inspiration, leading to further conversation and the development of joint projects. This has been referred to as a "corridor community". A place where doors open into a common hall in which ideas, humor, and personal interests converge. This leads to the second characteristic, interaction. Face to face, give and take. Looking in the eyes of the other person and seeing either understanding or total confusion. Third is shared interests. Though participants come from differing disciplines, areas of curriculum overlap must be ferreted out. They may not always be obvious, but careful analysis of all the courses involved will uncover similarities. The work of Drake and Jacobs, among others, addresses this point.

The fourth-- and additional-- component that we feel must be present to transform a community into an integrated unit is playfulness. A SENSE OF HUMOR. Anyone who has worked on a group project with colleagues who have no sense of the absurd or bizarre can attest to the deadliness of utter seriousness. In a situation of group decision making about interdisciplinary instruction, stress is the norm. The idea of shared decision making and the fear of moving beyond one's primary discipline can be stressful to many. There are colleagues who are less flexible than others. For interaction to flourish, give and take is essential. As the philosopher Morreall (1983) states, "the person who has a sense of humor is not just more relaxed in the face of potentially stressful situations, but is more flexible in his approach. ... His imagination and innovativeness will help keep him out of a mental rut, will allow him to enjoy himself, and so will prevent boredom and depression.(103)"

Can you force people to become part of the community? No. They may be part of the team, but that is all. Their contribution will be minimal, their disruption of the group interaction will be maximal.

Does proximity make people part of a community? No. It is an ongoing process that needs ongoing attention. Ownership and development of ideas must be shared through interaction. Group efforts will evolve on their own from the total team. These ideas need to have shared ownership and "community" backing in order to yield both success and interaction. The process cannot be forced. It must be allowed to take its own time.

Preservice exposure to curriculum integration

Conveying this multitude of ideas to preservice teacher education students is best done through modelling (Good & Brophy, 1991). College faculty must display the team process for the students. In their collegiate experiences, students rarely (if ever) encounter team teaching or integrated curriculum. They may read about these concepts, but this does not take the place of being a participant in such an activity. One example of such teaming took place during a recent semester when the instructors and students in methods courses in English and Social Studies combined forces to produce interdisciplinary units and materials at the middle school level. The focus for those units was Weasel (1990) by Cynthia de Felice.

This portion of the methods course was team taught by the professors of English Education and Social Science Education. Topics of universal interest were addressed jointly. These included cooperative learning, classroom ecology, middle school philosophy, authentic assessment, portfolios, communication skills, reading/writing across the curriculum, and others. To best insure that the theory and practice of curriculum integration was understood by the students, the entire process was modelled by their instructors. The facets of community were already extant with these two colleagues.

Place: Their offices are within shouting distance of each other, their own "corridor community."

Interaction: The two had previously worked together on several projects including an institute on curriculum integration and had presented jointly at state and national conferences. They seem to respect and enjoy each others company.

Mutuality of interests: They share an ongoing interest in young adult literature and its use across the curriculum and in looking for ways to eliminate duplication between programs. Both have similar approaches to teaching and learning.

Humor: They are good laughers and firm believers that too much seriousness is not a good thing.

The various characteristics of community building were addressed to the students by meeting class jointly (place), sharing joint lectures and discussions about topics of generalizable interest (interaction), and assigning a project to mixed groups (mutuality of interest). The element of humor was harder to identify in the groups, but by the fourth week of the interaction, laughter could be heard in group sessions as well as smiles and general enjoyment. What was missing was the time necessary for these elements to gel into true community. They were time specific and dependent upon the ability of the group members to open up and trust on a short term basis.

Project requirements.

The project was made up of five student teams each consisting of one English Education student and three Social Science Education students. This unbalanced ratio was necessitated by the disparate numbers in the two methods courses. All 20 students were nearing the end of their undergraduate programs and scheduled to student teach during the following semester. Specific coursework

in their backgrounds varied. For instance, all social science education students had coursework in U.S. history, just not the same courses. All English education students had a course in composition and one in young adult literature in common, as well as varied coursework in American literature and other areas. Classroom teaching experience also varied. Social science students had taught at least one class in a public school, English students had not. Ages of the group members ranged from 20 to 43. Five of the students would be considered "non traditional" in age. Three had previous undergraduate degrees and were working toward certification requirements and/or a second bachelor's degree.

Students were required to keep journals during the entire methods course. Specific entries regarding the project were included.

Journal responses

Journal responses can be seen to highlight the various components of community as well as the roadblocks generally seen in implementing integrated instruction.

Regarding place or proximity:

The shared space and class time provided students with an opportunity to see" the variety and style and

approach of each professor which made class more interesting" as well as an opportunity to "learn cooperative learning by using cooperative learning." Cooperative learning was a positive experience for one student who "liked the idea of being forced to rely upon others as well as having others rely on me - it made me work harder."

Shared space and cooperative learning also created "insights as what other teachers' fields encompass." Social Studies students "got to work on a lots of stuff pertaining to English lessons." English students had a chance to "look at teaching and reading from a different angle as well as to "see beyond language arts ... to understand in broader terms." Further both English and Social Studies students felt that the experience gave a "great insight, added a new perspective" and emphasized the importance of "synthesizing knowledge."

Not all student responses were positive. One felt that "we were thrown into something very deep and complex". Another concern was that the single English student in a group took "most of the load or felt that they had to" and that this was "unfair." In terms of cooperative learning, a student indicated that "I have a

very hard time working with others, I want my ideas to be the only ones used."

Regarding interaction:

The group interactions brought both personal and professional insights, although "the most difficult aspect (of the project) was the inter-group dynamics." On a personal level, what worked well was "learning to cooperate and dissect tasks" and to "respect others." Another student "feared that group members had different views of teaching and would be unable to blend ideas." Another explained interaction in terms of "giving support to one another and helping one another think through our reasoning." On a professional level, the interaction made students aware of "multiple ideas and materials, differing perspectives" and of the mix of "our various methods, ideas, and talents blended to compliment one another."

One student's journal entry combined both personal and professional insights. "It (the group unit planning) was stressful, annoying, upsetting, and a real pain in the butt! But I learned so much from the experience. Along with the pain and the agony it brought to my life, it brought a lot of understanding and experience. I have

realized that teachers must work together to accomplish many goals, especially in the middle school." Another states "I have learned about the many different considerations one must take into account when formulating a unit ... the many different ways to approach the task." The following reflection also combines the personal and the professional. "Perhaps our unit needs more improvement and more time spent developing it, but I am pleased with our attempt. (I had fun too!)" For another student, "it helped me solidify ideas I had about teaching and establish the first trial run of the dynamics of inter-teacher or colleague relationships." The student further felt that "the group was learning despite itself and that real growth occurred."

Regarding mutuality of interests:

Common interests, problems, and goals cement and maintain the working relationships within and between the groups. Because of this commonality, "nobody ever became offended or inflexible when there was a difference of opinion. We all realized that our goal was to help our students understand Weasel from its literary and historic aspects, not to fight amongst ourselves over who was

'right'."

The sharing of mutual interests is also enjoyable. "I found the group activities to be interesting. From them, I realized that sharing a topic can be much more fun than going it alone. I also found that if there is a conflict in personalities, sharing a topic is going to be rough, and that when you enter into a partnership you need to be prepared to do more than half the work -- things are not always evenly distributed."

The bonding, enjoyment, and productivity can be the result of sharing mutual interests. A student describes these elements as a garden. "We all were looking at the same backyard garden, but through different windows." Although she does not further extend her metaphor, other student comments indicate that the students all worked in the garden, separately and together; changed windows, borrowed tools, planted, watered, weeded, and harvested satisfying crops; and began to plan for their next gardens. Like gardening, "working together on an interdisciplinary unit was rewarding and very time consuming."

Regarding humor:

Humor was evident in the interactions within the

groups--smiling, laughing, and joking. Several students in their journal entries remarked that the unit was "fun" and one student "enjoyed it very much and felt that it had a positive influence." Humor or a spirit of playfulness was seen in one group's unit plan in which there was an elaborate description of "safely" losing middle school students in the wilderness. Another group demonstrated their spirit of play by arriving for their presentation dressed in Western blues--shirts, jeans, and bandannas.

Roadblocks to integrated curriculum

Roadblocks to the implementation of integrated curriculum projects in schools include (but are not limited to): personalities of individuals, compulsory teaming, content coverage issues, time, administrative support, parental support, student support, collegial/peer support. Students in the project encountered many of these same roadblocks.

Personalities.

Teams were chosen with balance of subject, gender, and age in mind. Personalities were not considered. In several of the groups this became a bigger problem than in others. One student described the problem as one of

ower or procrastination. "No one wanted to work as a roup. The first two times we met, we did nothing but argue. No one could decide anything. Decisions. Someone's got to make them, and no one did in my group until the last class." In addition, because there was a limited time commitment to the project and busy schedules, "everyone in my group did not want to give up the time to meet after class." The student reflecting on this group's process concluded that "we would have worked together better if we understood each other better." This group's experience was typical of most of the group dynamics, but was more intense and continued for a longer period of time.

Compulsory teaming.

Just like their more experienced colleagues, these students did not necessarily embrace the idea of teaming. They had the extrinsic motivator of a grade to force them to put up a good front, but several did not like it. There were fears that because of content concerns and approaches to teaching that groups would never reach agreement. There were also students who did not want to adapt their approaches or give up control of the lessons. One student indicated that "I have a very hard time

working with others. I want my ideas to be the only ones used." In commenting on the group interaction, this same student notes "our group did not really work well together."

Time.

Integrated units always take more time than anyone expects (Drake, 1993). This project was no exception. Students observed that "the amount of thought required to design an effective unit was surprising. Actually, the whole course is exhausting." Five weeks out of fifteen weeks were allotted to the project, four class sessions plus a week of vacation. In almost every instance, students suggested giving "more time. This will allow the group to learn to work together and make the project flow easier." The project should be extended "least one more week."

Students considered both the pressure of time and the value of time spent in developing their projects. For some, the time constraints created tension; "I felt like we were rushed to do a perfect unit." Another examined time in considering her participation in planning another integrated unit. "I think I would like to work with other teachers in the future but not an a regular basis because

the time aspect might not make it worth it for me and my students. The time might be used in other ways more usefully."

Administrative support.

In this case, the administration can be seen as the faculty members. It was a joint decision to give the students as clear, but broad instructions as possible. We did not want to influence the outcomes of the units by dictating what should be included. We did give outlines of what constituted a complete or "good" unit, but left specific decisions to the various groups. This was intended as giving students ownership of the project and as a means of developing group cohesion and understanding.

In many cases, our approach had that effect, but there were also several other responses. There was confusion as "we found ourselves asking what do they (the professors) really want from us?". Another felt that confusion was deliberate and guessed that "the professors wanted us to work together to figure it out for ourselves what a unit was. To be honest, I really did not understand what I was doing until the third class." For one, the confusion continued. "This project left me

bitter and frustrated because I never did a unit before and even upon completion, I'm still not sure how to do one."

Collegial support.

In schools, one of the most frustrating side effects of integrated instruction is the lack of support from colleagues who are not involved in the process (Stevenson & Carr, 1993; Drake, 1993). In this project, students experienced frustration when members of their team were not able or willing to contribute equally. "The guys liked to put things off. This really made me angry to find that they were not doing their share." As in cooperative learning groups, students were given both a group grade and an individual grade on the project. Individual grades were determined by a combination of the group members' evaluations of each other in terms of participation as well as the professors' observations. This evaluation system produced from one student the observation that there should be "mandatory attendance for all the sessions. Members of the group were the best part of the experience. If someone is absent, everyone misses out."

Conclusions

Although students may have experienced roadblocks, by and large, their journal entries and conversations indicate that they considered the project to be valuable and worth repeating. As we have shown, the experiences of the students (and their professors) mirror the components of community (place, interaction, mutuality of interest, humor). The same basic patterns that would exist in the school setting were replicated as closely as possible under the circumstances of the combined unit.

Modeling of difficult concepts impacts on all parties involved. It was a growth experience for both of us as well as our students. They have acquired the beginnings of a technique that may or may not be perfected throughout their teaching careers. We have reinforced our believe that the walls of the various disciplines can sometimes be more of a hindrance than a help in reaching students. By beginning to break down those walls, we both were energized and motivated to continue to develop such interactions in bigger and better ways. The semester following this project, we developed and team taught a summer course which combined the areas of literature and social studies. As of the

writing of this paper, we have already been approached by methods teachers from other secondary disciplines to join in on the fun. To be continued...

Afterword

"*This is my story which I have related. If it be sweet, or if it be not sweet, take some elsewhere, and let some come back to me*" (Haley, 1970).

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